

INTERVIEWS WITH MEMBERS OF

Sex Pistols • Dead Kennedys • MDC • Subhumans • Crass • X • Gang of Four
Bad Religion • Blackfire • Bad Brains • Minor Threat • Sonic Youth • The Slits
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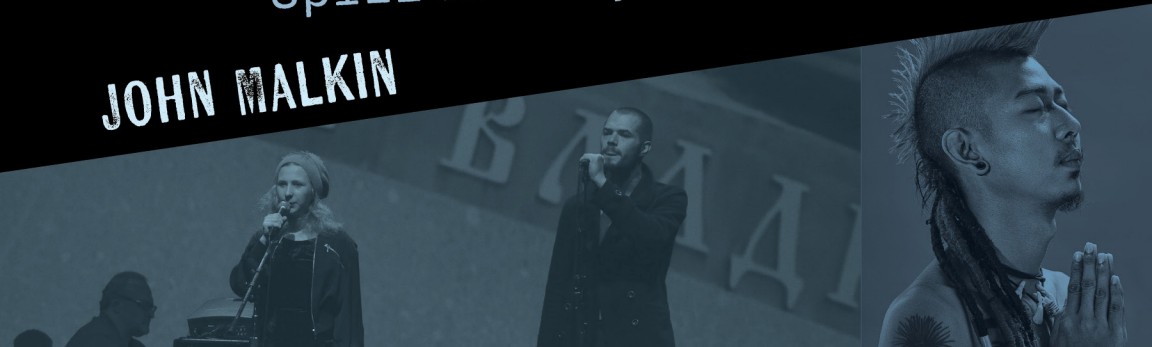
FOREWORD BY PENNY RIMBAUD



PUNK SPIRIT!

An Oral History of Punk Rock,
spirituality, and Liberation

JOHN MALKIN



BLOOMSBURY

Additional Praise

“*Punk Spirit!*, with its unique blend of anarchic counterculture and classic psychoanalytical theory, makes for a most compelling read. From incarnation to oral history, the power of punk compels you!” —**Steven Blush, author and filmmaker, *American Hardcore***

“I devoured *Punk Spirit!* in two sittings. It was pure enjoyment to read—pure exhilaration! Crack open *Punk Spirit!* and behold a ‘volatile church’ where the lifeblood of a rich, complex, and passionately punk spirituality surges through every page. Incited by John Malkin’s galvanizing questions, the collective voices of his interlocutors raise up a kaleidoscopic vision of punk spirit that is as vibrantly alive as it is full of surprises.” —**Glenn Wallis, guitarist for Ruin, author of *An Anarchist’s Manifesto***

“*Punk Spirit!* is an affirming and varied testimony to the significance of punk music and spirit in the library of humanity and existence. Explore! The Spirit of Punk reflects how, in our extreme punk expression of letting go of societal norms and indoctrination, we find liberation and peace in reaching for and manifesting another state of being and its possibilities.” —**Yaotl Mazahua, Iconoclast, Aztlan Underground (aka Anahuak Underground)**

“A skilled interviewer, John Malkin is one of a handful of punk mavens willing to explore its deep, spiritual intimations. This is a monumental collection of conversations, offering anyone with a reasonable curiosity about punk rock and spirituality the opportunity to understand their amorphous, vibrant, and sometimes revolutionary entanglements. If God is dead, punk is not dead, and the anti-establishment postures and rebellious spirit captured in Malkin’s book lives on!” —**Ken Chitwood, religion scholar, journalist, and theologian**

“Punk is far from dead; it is getting richer and richer. We are lucky to have John Malkin look at a very specific aspect of that world. With gems from more than 150 interviews conducted over the course of a quarter century, *Punk Spirit!* is an important contribution to the ever-growing oral history of one of the world’s most compelling subcultures.” —**Gabriel Kuhn, author of *Sober Living for the Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge, and Radical Politics***

PUNK SPIRIT!

**AN ORAL HISTORY OF PUNK ROCK,
SPIRITUALITY, AND LIBERATION**

JOHN MALKIN

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Figure 0.1 John Malkin interviews H.R. on the Bad Brains tour bus before their 2010 concert in Santa Cruz, California. Photo by Matt Fitt.

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FOREWORD

BENEATH THE MASK

Religion is dogma rather than faith or, conversely, religion is faith in dogma; much the same applies to politics. The crows fly wild with not a shadow to part them. Hush, winds blow.

Whoosh, spiritual identity is an oxymoron. Likewise, spiritualism is not an alternative to materialism, rather it is an extension of its egotistic vanities. Our natural-born entity becomes mutated by the vulgarities of Freud's "id" which, coupled with Cartesian vagaries, becomes the "I am" of the consumerist individual where, truly, "we are not." Buy now, tomorrow never arrives. Meanwhile, beneath this materialist mask, there is nothing but eternal emptiness bound to an immovable "isness." Spirit cannot be worn; we stand alone, naked in body and mind. So yes, know thyself, but first accept that your self is not the self you might like to think it is. There is no question: identity falsifies entity. Id? I think not.

All things are sentient: animal, vegetable, and mineral, the breath and the breather. This is both being and non-being, not a path, but a universe dancing its dance, an ever-changing yet static symbiosis. One foot before the other we walk, always mindful, traveling nowhere. The "middle way"? There is no way. Journeys are nothing but reflections in a static pool. Quantum infinities and Blake's grain of sand prove the void: no Gods, no masters. Only silence.

We are prisoners of consciousness, which is in itself self-deluding. Fly, then, fly if you must, but know that transcendence is but a flight of fancy. There is nothing above, nothing below, nowhere to run, nothing to know. Never again, but how could it be otherwise? Each is its own unrepeatable moment. We are alone in this, yet we are also profoundly together. Each move and every moment

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is both multidirectional and multidimensional in its entirety. Neither here nor there, the symbiosis is beyond delusions of time and space. In short, it has no body. As much as we drift forward, so we fall backward. Attempts to harbor these forces merely compound the poisonous nature of the materialist narrative. The boat has pulled anchor. The ocean consumes. The tides turn.

Harmony versus friction; being essentially divisive, ideologies lead to conflict. No doubt. Mind the gap. Are you joking? It takes a stone a lifetime to walk, two to talk. Then what might it have to say, and where might it feel free to say it? The Piper has long since crested the brow of the hill, Nietzsche lies defeated in the valley, and Moses avalanches to rest as mere moraine. Thou shalt if thou choose to, yet the inexplicable has no voice. Silence is a language. The lotus is simple transference, matter from mud which is also matter. Then where the this and the that of it? Where the division? I am thou as thou art I. Then why the pain? Pain is in attachment. No exception. The manacles are an abacus. Count me out. If you think you're meditating, you're not. Prostration is flagellation. Remorse is a form of self-hatred. Hatred is a form of failed love. Love is all, or love is not at all.

In breathless skies, the crows drift unmeasured, clouds also. No contradictory song to sing, no horizon that is not other. Sentience is in and of all things, all matter. Now is an eternity. There is no escape. We are the never of forever. In the nanoseconds between an event and our perception of it, anything could happen. Thus the indefinable passes us by, describing greater universes than ever we might imagine. Beware, for ism is schism. Left or right, the lake is frozen. Illusion is delusion casting blame. Nothing is happening because there is nothing to happen. We live; we die. Spot the difference. The fusion is entire. If you think you've got the answer, you didn't hear the question.

Penny Rimbaud, January 2025

BE PUNK NOW

We gotta *Be Punk Now*. Here in the twenty-first century, to attain the pure raw state of punk is just a dream. We would have to tear off a mile-thick layer of saturation advertising, artificial intelligence, and mountains encrusted with pixels. It's time to whip up the force of a new honesty, a no-bullshit counter-invasion against corporate virtual consumer culture that is making mass extinction at the present moment.

John Malkin's view of punk comes from the far side of the Rock barrage, from the world against which Americans in particular have battlements of neuroses. We erase the Spirit with stark raving fear. It's in the roots, the loving gentleness, and the hit-and-run visions that held together the ecosystem of punk. And still holds it together. Punk lives. But we have to find it again.

Debra White Plume, the Oglala prophet, believed that the Earth would rise up to cleanse and balance and do what had to be done to make life survive, and that the Earth would reach out to human beings and invite our participation in this work. And Debra White Plume went on to say that some humans would immediately respond to the Earth and work with her. Others would hesitate and disappear.

We still might have time. We need to enter the fire and flood and walk among the ruins after the disaster has passed; the Spirit of punk is there. It is the spiritual life in direct experience. No sneaky product placements, view-counts, reputational consultations . . . A rock 'n' roll scream for Earth justice could rise from the rubble of a thousand tornadoes. It was just as strange in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The same Spirit moved through kamikaze artists who walked into the lies with a loud sound.

BE PUNK NOW

The Spirit moves farther into actualized experience with punk because punk self-enforces directness. But in today's all-bullshit-all-the-time culture, locating the punk is like diving for pearls. The Earth is today's great punk—an honest, fearless comeback at the lies. That's the Sixth Extinction. A punk rock hit that goes on for decades. As life after life leaves us, and finally we leave too . . . Will we be able to duet with that world-scale fuck you? I'm sure some of us will go down with our rock screaming like 200 mph wind. Earthalujah!

Rev. Billy Talen—The Church of Stop Shopping
February 2025

INTRODUCTION

THE MUSIC OF NO MUSIC

Are you ready to be liberated?

—“The Young Crazy Peeling” by The Distillers (2002)

The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.

—“Buddhist Anarchism” by Gary Snyder (1961)

Things are not as they seem. Nor are they otherwise.

—Buddhist Lankavatara Sutra

The reason I’m not a Buddhist is because Buddha wasn’t a Buddhist! He was just a bloke sitting on his ass with ideas and insights. I’m the same.

—Penny Rimbaud (Crass)

No Gods, No Masters.

—Anarchist slogan

Life gets intense / Just like rock and roll.

—“I Live in The City” by The Humans (1979)

INTRODUCTION

Everything is connected with everything else.

—Sign on studio wall at end of video for “Failed Imagineer”
by *Propagandhi* (2017)

I discovered punk rock and Buddhism around the same time when I was seventeen years young in 1979. Both appealed to my rebellious side that intuitively sensed what I’d learned about the world from adults was, at best, incomplete. Punk rock pushed me toward anarchism, high-energy music, and questioning authority. Buddhist meditation practices grounded my journey and revealed truths about interconnection, impermanence, and liberation. Punk and spirituality both create energy that connects people through self-expression, emotional release, and creative responses like music, writing, film, art, and direct social action. Punk rock has sometimes been an attempt to take music beyond the confines of music, thereby manifesting the *music of no music*. This sentiment easily coalesces with Alan Watts’ 1951 philosophy book *The Wisdom of Insecurity* where he describes Buddhism as “The religion of no religion.”

Punk and spirituality harmonize toward liberation and living free, and this surprising combination has kept me company during my adult life. Naturally, people have asked, “Punk is loud and angry while spirituality is calm and compassionate. How do those go together?” *Punk Spirit!* is partly an attempt to answer that, plus deeper questions like: What makes music a spiritual, transcendent experience? What’s the difference between religion and spirituality? Is personal and collective liberation possible? Why has the power of punk rock been combined with spiritual and religious traditions? Do social and personal liberation happen through creating or destroying? Or both? How have punk musicians been affected emotionally by their music? What’s the use of anger and other intense emotions? How best to transcend suffering? The voices in *Punk Spirit!* offer insights into liberation, living free, and how to respond creatively to injustice. They describe the importance of community and also criticize the hypocrisy of religions used for control and permanent war. They practice authentic self-expression and revolutionary love through words, music, and direct actions.

2025 marks sixty years since proto-punk band Los Saicos (Peru) released the song “Demolición” in 1964, and forty-nine years since the Ramones’ self-titled debut album was released (April 23, 1976). It’s forty-eight years since the release of *Damned, Damned, Damned* (February 18, 1977) and *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s The Sex Pistols* (October 28, 1977), which the Pistols will perform live on July 4, 2025 (with Frank Carter instead of John Lydon). Patti Smith

INTRODUCTION

is seventy-eight years old and celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of her album *Horses* with a 2025 Europe/US tour. Iggy Pop is seventy-seven. Final tours were announced in 2024 by Gang of Four, Devo, and X while 69-year-old H. R. (Bad Brains) is on a Spring 2025 US tour with Dead Kennedys. On January 1, 2025, Au Pairs singer/guitarist Lesley Woods released her first new music since 1982: *In The Fade* with “Say Peace” and “Let it Go.” Propagandhi announced the May 2, 2025 release of their eighth studio album with Chris Hannah singing on the title song; “I am at peace these days, give or take a fit of blinding rage.”

Last year, Klee Benally, of Diné punk band Blackfire passed away at the age of forty-eight, just after contributing the foreword to the first book in this series, *Punk Revolution!* and producing his own book, *No Spiritual Surrender: Indigenous Anarchy in Defense of the Sacred*, and an anti-colonial board game called *Burn the Fort*. I had an interview scheduled on May 7, 2024, with Gary Floyd, singer with the Dicks, Sister Double Happiness, and Black Kali Ma and on May 3 Floyd passed away surrounded by loved ones in San Francisco. Nick Cave would’ve fit very nicely in these discussions of punk and spirituality, but my attempts to contact him were unsuccessful. His 2022 book, *Faith, Hope and Carnage*, and 2024 album, *Wild God* express spirited emotional connections to loss and beauty, grief and gratitude, longing and empathy. Maybe I’ll catch up with Cave for my next book.

“People always talk shit about religious people and spirituality,” says Cruz, like “Oh, you believe in a man in the sky.” But then the same people come up to me and look to me like I, or my songs, have the answers to their questions. Because everyone’s looking for something, everybody needs something. Sometimes, as a dad and as a husband, I wish I could call my dad or somebody and just ask “What the fuck do I do here?” Everybody needs a Northern star. So, while those two lines kind of contradict each other, at the same time they lend to each other that we’re all just looking for something and we all put our belief in something, no matter how ridiculous or superstitious it is. And those things can let you down, but they also can rise you up.

Jason Cruz of Strung Out; April 2024 press release for album *Dead Rebellion* (Fat Wreck Chords)

GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Punk Spirit! is the second in a trilogy of books between *Punk Revolution!* (2023) and the forthcoming *Punk Roots!* Thanks to Michael Tan and Rowman & Littlefield / Bloomsbury for supporting my dream of creating this expansive series on punk rock, spirituality, and social change. All of these interviews were originally broadcast on Free Radio Santa Cruz (1997–2016), San Francisco Liberation Radio (1999–2000), and KZSC 88.1 FM / kzsc.org at the University of California, Santa Cruz (2016–2025). I’m very grateful to everyone who helped sustain Free Radio Santa Cruz for thirty years; it was a dynamic anarchist, punk rock experiment. Special gratitude to Uncle Dennis. Some of the interviews in *Punk Spirit!* were previously published in print in *Z Magazine*, *Razorcake*, *Punk Planet*, *Spirituality & Health*, *Lion’s Roar*, *In These Times*, *The Santa Cruz Sentinel*, and *The Santa Cruz Good Times*. I have made considerable effort to contact copyright owners of images and seek permission from interviewees. Should any rights owners come forth, I shall include permissions in future printings of *Punk Spirit!* My interviews with Henry Rollins are not included in this book and are available online at kzsc.org. I have capitalized the word “god” only when it seemed the interviewee was doing that in their speech, and I’ve chosen not to capitalize the word “capitalism,” to put it in its place.



PUNK AND SPIRITUALITY

DIRECT CONNECTION/MEANING AND PURPOSE/IN THE FLOW

Spirituality is very much about doing what you believe in and being aware of other sources of information. Every person has got their own percentage of how much spirituality they think they need to take notice of.

—Dick Lucas (Subhumans)

Music has that ability to make you lose track of time and be so fully mentally and physically engaged that that's all you can do.

—John Doe (X)

I had a spiritual experience listening to it.

—Flea on hearing the Germs album *GI* (“The Spiritual Punk Record That Changed Flea’s Life Forever” by Aimee Ferrer, *Far Out Magazine*, June 1, 2023)

Punk rock is commonly associated with anarchy, slam dancing, spikey hair, self-published zines, social change activism, and DIY record production. Spirituality is not often linked to the world of punk rock, and organized religion has been passionately criticized in many punk songs. In the meantime, punks have embraced self-expression and living free by developing cooperative communities, creating art and music in response to injustice, feeding the homeless, opposing cultures of domination, experimenting with emotional authenticity,

and aiming for personal and social liberation—realms and actions that might be called spiritual.

While organized religions and other authoritarian institutions serve as controlling gatekeepers between humans and nature, many spiritual traditions embrace life-enhancing practices that throw open the door to anyone who would like direct and full participation in their own life, without a middle person. Where organized religion relies on judgment, coercion, and laws, spiritual mystics are process-oriented and thrive on living free. Mystics embrace mystery and paradox and aim for joyful community through music, poetry, and dance. Indeed, punk rock might be called the *modern mystical arm of rock and roll*. As Ian MacKaye told me, “I celebrate the journey rather than the goal.”

Punk rock signified a return to the radical roots of the unholy trinity of amplified guitar, bass, and drums. From anarcho-punk to straight edge to Krishna-core, punks have experimented with rebellious, creative responses to injustice and suffering. The slam dancing and sonic blast of punk rock may seem far from spiritual practices like meditation and compassion, but the alternate reality created inside a punk basement concert has a surprisingly similar intensity to that of Indigenous American sweat lodge ceremonies. Or Victor Sanchez’s recapitulation box, primal scream therapy, holotropic breathing, whirling Sufi dervishes, Tibetan Buddhist cymbals and chanting, or Osho’s wild dancing meditations. The idea is to be fully present to life’s experiences, express emotions creatively, and contribute to the world. Punk is a process.

VOLATILE CHURCH

LENNY KAYE (Patti Smith Group): Punk rock is music of the human spirit. All music, including punk rock, is spiritual. Music doesn’t speak to our rational, conscious mind. It speaks to our unconscious mind. To connect with that is beyond all genre and style of music. All music reaches inside your soul. Punk rock is, in its own way, a variant of the greater music. Just like there’s different people in the world but we’re all reflecting the eye of God. If you can reach that with any music then you’re in the realm of being blessed.

JM: I imagine you’d say there are particular things about punk that facilitate that.

LENNY KAYE (Patti Smith Group): It doesn’t make a difference what route you use to get there, as long as you get there. On the other hand, it’s interesting to look at the scenery on whatever road you’ve chosen. Punk rock, with its emphasis on a confrontational energy and a sense of making things move just a little bit faster

and a sense of aggression and, in some ways, sensuality; it's a way to connect with your core. It's loud. It has a lot of the things that all great spiritual gatherings have; a sense of trance and rhythm and communal energy. It really works well in a social setting. You look at especially the more extreme forms of punk rock with the mosh pit and people surfing on top of each other, where the audience is as much a part of the band as the band themselves, leaping up on the stage, leaping off the stage. It's a very volatile church.

JONATHAN RICHMAN (Modern Lovers): Music with feeling is spiritual. It's music with heart and soul. When music affects you in your guts, then it's got spirit. I think that all sound is spiritual. The sound of voices and instruments is spiritual—*just* the sound. The colors that sound makes are from the spirit.

JM: Sometimes I have a hard time using words to define what spirituality means.

JONATHAN RICHMAN (Modern Lovers): I would! I'm just saying, "heart and soul." To me, if you don't feel it, it ain't there. Music is spiritual because it's talking about feeling. That's what the spiritual part of music is. You're feeling. That's it. Whenever young groups ask me; "Hey, we're going into the studio, what should we do?" I always say the same thing; "Sing and play what you feel. And *don't* sing and play what you *don't* feel." They say, "That's it?" I say, "That's it."

MARK ANDERSEN (*Dance of Days* / Positive Force DC): To this day I will argue with anyone who tells me that punk rock is about music. Or it's a style of dress or it's about tattoos and piercings. I'll admit that certain aspects of those signifiers are identified with punk, but the essence of punk is something that can't be contained by any of those things. It is a spirit that is seeking the truth and is willing to challenge the world, and yourself, in that process. What I've just described is the spiritual search. If people don't like certain terms, that's fine. But let us agree that not just punk, but all art is part of a spiritual journey, to the extent that it is about seeking truth and striving toward authentic expression. The only reason we think they're opposed (punk and spirituality) is because we've bought into concepts that are actual blasphemy against love, beauty or truth.

PETER CASE (The Nerves / Plimsouls): Usually, spirituality is about trying to be good to people. To find a place where you belong and where you're centered and happy simply with being alive, within your spiritual self. Often finding that place doesn't come through buying things. It's something you find within yourself.

PENNY RIMBAUD (Crass): One of the great spiritual masters was John Coltrane. He hardly ever said a word, but he said everything that is. And sometimes it was uncomfortable because it *is* uncomfortable. Sometimes he was profoundly beautiful because it *is* profoundly beautiful. He didn't need the words to give us

light. It was in his very being and his progression through “Love Supreme” and then into his *come with me or suffer the consequences*. Like a good Zen master. It’s a violent world and you’ve got to go along with it. If you resist, you’re going to get hurt.

YAOTL MAZAHUA (Iconoclast / Aztlan Underground aka Anahuak Underground): Music saved my life. Especially punk and hip-hop. Music is a medicine as it heals by validating and empowering. I do music for that same reason, in order to lift spirits and provide medicine. It literally uplifted me in times of darkness just like spirituality does, therefore it is spiritual. Indigenous culture values songs as medicine, so it’s about intention, purpose and wellness. Both bands are committed to this intention and therefore are prayers to the universe. Whether angry, introspective or analytical, it is all inspired by love.

CELINE BELLI (Rotten Ruckus): Starting a band and being in the punk music scene saved my life when I was sixteen. I tried to commit suicide and I came back from it. The only thing that kept me going was music. I think it would be fascist to say punk is a religion in itself but I think the spirit of punk saved me. Our Oxford dictionary defines spirituality as “elevating principle.” That’s the spirit of punk. I know a lot of punk people from a pagan background who celebrate deities and gods. I come from a Buddhist background and everything I grew up with makes me appreciate punk for what it is. People can be hard-line (straight edge), Christian, Muslim or whatever and if you understand the element of punk, it doesn’t really matter what religion you’re from. That’s just the freedom of spirit. It’s not attached to a belief or religion; it’s about freedom. The band Bane from America were straight edge, but they remained positive. They were always open to fans who weren’t straight edge. I went to see them twice in Kuala Lumpur and Manchester. There are still people out there who have their own ideas and ethics, but they don’t impose on people.

MATT CLEAVER (Stalin’s War): Even if punk is not primarily spiritual it may be secondary in many ways because it can help people get on a positive track with their lives. Because they listen to a song and relate to the whole vibe, it really can mean a lot. It meant a lot to me.

TWO PATHS: SELF-DEFENSE AND BLESSING WAY

CLAYSON BENALLY (Blackfire / Sihasin): In the Navajo culture and spiritual practices there’s a belief that there’s two paths within each of us. On one hand we have our arrowhead, ‘Anaa’jí, the enemy way. This is self-defense, protection.

It's the way of our Naabaahí warrior society. And then on the other hand, we have our corn pollen, Táá'díín; the things that give life. That's Hózóónjí, the blessing way. We have these two powerful ways to navigate through life. We have our prayer, but we also have our self-defense or protection and we learn how to navigate both of those worlds.

Every weekend we'd be going to ceremonies with my dad. (Jones Benally) I'd be helping him out or hiking up to the mountain tops, being with nature. I felt more comfortable in solitude or in a spiritual, ceremonial setting where I was helping out at various ceremonies with my uncles, my dad's relatives. That process definitely started to help me identify this spiritual path that we have. That was part of my foundation.

On the other hand, when we were starting to tour and perform as a punk rock band (Blackfire) I found that there was almost equal solace in a mosh pit. You'd go into a show where it was like a sweat lodge. You'd be with tons of other youth releasing so much pent-up frustration and anger, identifying with the music. And that song might be talking about a particular political or social issue. A lot of punk genres at that time were more politically oriented and talking about issues that were pertinent, that you could see but had zero control over. But when you'd listen to these songs, you'd get into this mosh pit and vent and release and it felt like something maybe on a higher level may have been contacted. This is a process of coping, learning to release and at the end of that punk rock show, the weight of the world has been released and you feel human again. It's such a very unique feeling. Now when you go to a music show and you don't get to dance and you're seated, you don't allow all of your senses to fully connect. It's such a different experience going to a concert today (2024) versus a punk rock show back in the 1980s or 1990s or '2000s. There was a transference of energy that you used to be able to feel and connect with more.

JENEDA BENALLY (Blackfire / Sihasin): No one goes into a mosh pit to look pretty! You go into a mosh pit to let go of yourself and learn how to go with a flow and the faith that you put in others around you. You bounce off people, fall down, hit the ground, but people pick you up. It's having that faith, "Hey, I'm going to be okay at the end of it all." It's the same with life. I might come out with some scars, bumps and scrapes, but I'm going to be okay.

I also want to go back to the concept of punk rock and spirituality. I feel like a lot of people have this kind of illusion of *punks not caring*. But I feel it's the opposite. It's that we care so passionately, that it's not only about what is here and now. At least for me, it's about what is the past and what is the future? And what can I do to honor the past but also ensure a better future? Going back to

what we were talking about earlier; you can't buy your way to spirituality. You can't bomb your way to spirituality. Yes, you can find religion. It's a book, a great guide into spirituality. But you have to find your own way and that's kind of the punk in all of this; you have to find your own sense of spirituality. Where do you sit within yourself? Where do you sit within this world? How are you connected to your community? It's not about the disconnection, but rather about the connection. And how do we then connect with each other to attain the better world? It's not even about attaining spirituality, but about reconnection. When you gravitate toward what you are, then you know you're becoming your authentic self. Even though I'm a punk musician, I am traditional Diné and I resonate with that spiritual connection with the Earth, with my relationship with plants, people, animals, the water and I recognize how our relationship is to be in harmony, in balance.

CLAYSON BENALLY (Blackfire / Sihasin): When you think of self-sacrifice in a lot of indigenous philosophies or practices, you'll have things like the sweat lodge. Or some of the Plains tribes do a fast that is a four-day process of testing one's limits within the physical form. Punk rock is like this. As Jeneda was saying, it's about finding that true, authentic element within yourself and being free. A lot of people view punk rock as dangerous. And it's there when you look at traditional indigenous ceremonies like the Sundance where there's flesh offerings or piercings. When somebody is trying to obtain a spiritual kind of understanding with the universe and looking for guidance, there's a journey and oftentimes it's not going to be comfortable. You're going to be self-sacrificing. But it's the process.

JOHN ROBB (The Membranes / *Punk Rock: An Oral History*): Punk and spirituality is a really interesting angle. Obviously, you've got Krishnacore and also Christian and Muslim punks. You could argue that a lot of time, pop culture is people seeking—maybe not so much spirituality—but trying to make sense of the world in a way that spirituality would have done two hundred years ago.

RAY CAPPO (Youth of Today / Shelter): I took a lot of hell for being in a punk band that was singing spiritual lyrics! People said, "Hey, you can't do that. You went from straight edge into spirituality? That doesn't belong here! This is punk rock." And I said, "Well, what does punk rock mean?" They said, "It means no God." I said, "Well, it means there are no rules." So, when you live in a world of no rules, we said, "We're going to bring spirit back into music." Music can be a vehicle for hate and political angst. Or for messages of unity. I was always interested in how to bring people together. Jesus wasn't trying to create Christians. Buddha wasn't trying to create Buddhists. There's universal spiritual truths and those truths have a lot in common. We're already spiritual beings; we just forgot.

Many will argue that spirituality is the origin of music. Music was originally an homage, prayer or praise to a higher power, spirits and energies. So, to kick God or spirit out of music—that’s the bastardization of music!

ROB FISH (108 / Resurrection / Judas Factor): The thing that’s always hard for the punk scene to digest is seeing the difference between religion and spirituality. I’m fairly anti-religious. I think that goes back to the root that it always runs deeper than the external allows you to see. Spirituality and punk rock are one and the same in the sense that both are striving to understand things more deeply than they seem on the surface. Whether people are atheists or into religion, a large majority in this world feel they need to know something that other people don’t know; that they have truth at their beck and call. Whether *there is no truth* or *this old man rules the world* or *this woman is the most supreme deity*; everybody seems to feel they have something that other people just don’t have. To me, it’s kind of silly. All we have are our experiences and things that touch us.

RIKKI VANDERPOL (Dying for It): I’ve come into this stage of my life where I’m seeking—I don’t want to say spirituality—but, looking for something more meaningful. The normal Christianity isn’t for me. Joe (Clements) from the Deathless recorded my second band (Dance for Destruction) and he was telling me about choosing the dharma. So, I’ve been exploring that realm of spirituality.

JOHN STOCKBERGER (Sense Field): There was a crossover between punk and spirituality in 1980’s hardcore and that became part of the scene. My own interest in spirituality and self-discovery happened during the same time I got into punk rock. I was already into the Sex Pistols but when hardcore hit it was the same time I got interested in Buddhism. For me it’s always been connected. I gravitated to Buddhism because there was a lot of baggage with the concept of God, churches and religions. I was in a comparative religion class in eighth grade and the teacher got to Buddhism and told us the Buddha had said, “Life is suffering.” Of course, at that age you’re like, “Yeah! That sounds right!” (*laugh*) I got really interested in Buddhism from that point forward. I was already into punk rock. A lot of punk rock people were devout atheists, and I tended more toward that. There has to be more going on in reality and on the spiritual level than we were being presented. It’s like we were being short-changed on some level.

GLENN WALLIS (Ruin / *An Anarchist’s Manifesto*): Ruin was spiritual in the sense that we valued practices that led to self-overcoming. In the earliest days we would plaster the city (Philadelphia) with flyers that combined a shocking image with a provocative statement. I remember one that had an image of a starving child in Biafra with stomach distended with the statement, “A monstrosity born of decaying humanity.” At the bottom right-hand corner was the Ruin logo. No

show dates, no album for sale. We were careful to paste them not only in the usually gritty spots where punks hung out, but also where morning commuters from the suburbs would see them. That is a kind of punk spiritual sermon! We wanted people to leave our shows feeling uplifted. The times were grim. Darkness and despair were even *fashionable* in certain punk circles. I love darkness and melancholy more than practically anyone, but we didn't want to be dragged down by our subculture. The "spiritual" in this case might be the uplifting with clear eyes.

Most people generally get along. It takes effort to bring people into the dogma of political and religious regimes who want power, which is politics and not God. They are the ones who divide us and create conflict. Spirituality is an answer against that. Punk rock was an answer toward liberation. We said, "No! We want freedom." We want freedom spiritually, emotionally, physically, mentally and expressively; all these types of freedom.

DAVE DICTOR (MDC): The band came out of a frustration of us not wanting to be part of the world and not wanting to be passive. At the same time, we weren't so armed with a spiritual sense of how to go about confronting it. So, it became a very physical and visceral performance. I'm multidimensional and if we have to go for a label to define ourselves, which people seem to love to do, then people can just hold *that* label: multidimensional!

JONNY WICKERSHAM (Social Distortion): Music is such a spiritual thing for me because it's such a release. Whether it's through the lyrics of a song or the music or both together. Music really is *the* thing that has moved me more than anything else in my whole life. And there's been many shows that were really spiritual in nature. You walk off the stage and you're drained after giving everything you've got. It's very satisfying.

STEVEN LEE BEEBER (*The Heebie-Jeebie's at CBGB's: A Secret History of Jewish Punk*): Spirituality to me is not limited to religion; the ritual and dogma. I think of music as a kind of spiritual expression. Similar to the ideals of a lot of the lefties in New York of the 1930s who created collectives, this sort of idealism of a better world has aspects of spirituality and there is a lot of that in punk.

REVEREND BILLY TALEN (The Church of Stop Shopping): It's part of the DIY nature of spirituality that our side of activism—the earth spirit program—is less developed and less sure of itself than formal religions that have the patriarch in charge. In formal religions the marketing and theological end are very well developed. For us in the Church of Stop Shopping it's experimental. All of us are in recovery from our grandparents' religious fundamentalism! We're activists who sing. I was raised by right-wing Christians from Holland, Michigan. They were Dutch Reformed Christians, creators of apartheid. Part of my wearing the polyester suit

as the Elvis-impersonating-late-night-televangelist character Reverend Billy is my own self-appropriation of my right-wing caste. I defend myself against it by making fun of it. But the people in the thirty-five-voice choir have backgrounds in Hinduism, Islam, Catholicism and Judaism. We're all kinds of fundamentalists!

CONNECTED TO EVERYTHING ELSE

JM: What's your view on spirituality and how it fits, or doesn't, with the punk approach?

AMY RAY (Indigo Girls): It depends on where you live. In the South, we're pretty steeped in spirituality. Most of the musicians I grew up with, I would consider them extremely religious. It didn't seem like a weird idea to me to combine the two and to have it all affect each other. Even Ian MacKaye and the Dischord set in D.C. had a sense of a power that was mysterious and greater than themselves. And some sense of something; I don't know what. You can feel it when they talk about what they did. For me it's like this; the creator is this omnipresent sort of thing and the world is all invested with a spirit and so you live engaged with all that. Punk is about community and it can't really exist without that network of the web of intermingling and looking at things as being invested with some kind of power in your community. My spirituality is not about an authority figure. It's about something that's within me and it can manifest itself and do greater things than I can do by myself because it gets connected to everything else. That's the kind of religion I have.

Any fundamentalist or orthodox religion, including fundamentalist Christianity, has an authority and often it's a male figure that is angry and has rules and walls. A lot of people resist it and I can understand why. They don't want to be affiliated with it. I don't even want to be! That's what rebellion is about: questioning authority. Emily (Saliers) works a lot with the reconciliation movement within the church and it's hard for her. It's hard to say, "I go to a Christian church, I'm Christian," because there are so many bad connotations. A lot of my friends that are activists—not in the native community, but in white communities—are more secular. It's always hard for me because I'm used to: *you pray before you do things*. That's why I'm so comfortable working in the indigenous communities because it's the same thing. A lot of the punk bands that I grew up with around Atlanta, and people on Daemon (Ray's record label) like Danielle Howl, she's a total punk rocker and so gospel-oriented and all about Jesus. It's just in you. You can't help it. Even if you're pagan, it's in you.

STEWART EBERSOLE (*Barred for Life*): Whatever gets me closer to transcendence is a great thing. Each person has a different switch to get them to break down certain barriers. Punk did that for me. It changed me from a kid that was probably destined to become a redneck construction worker to a person that broke down every political and social barrier in his own head and began to make his own decisions. I'm not only thankful for that; I will eternally owe it back to that scene. How do you pay it back? Punk doesn't have temples and shrines. You can't really make offerings anywhere.

MITA SCHAMAL (Namenlos): Spirituality and punk rock are liberation. Music is a small part of punk. Music is wonderful; it's a very good gift. You can play with the vibrations. But for me, the point is not just to make music, it's also to dance or write. And draw, paint, play theater, make jokes, kiss each other, touch each other, have relationships; all this is punk for me. But especially punk means to liberate ourselves from all the prisons and cages we get from the outside and the inside, from your trauma and desires. To liberate ourselves is punk.

HIDÉ FUJIWARA (Ultra Bidé): Music is attached to everything; music is attached to the universe. The Black African woman Lucy was the first punk rocker. A long time ago she played music, she ate, had sex, looked at the sky. That means the first musician—Lucy—was attached to everything. That means every subject is for musicians.

ROB FISH (108): You've got to change yourself internally, change how you view yourself and others, for anything to change on a wide scale. Politics isn't outside. I might chant "Hare Krishna" and the guy next to me might chant "Hare Krishna" but he might be a pro-life, right-wing piece of garbage. It's not just about doing some activity or believing in something that's going to all of a sudden make things right. If it were that easy, we'd already be there. It's a combination of having some sort of spiritual understanding of yourself and the world around you and not being lazy in terms of applying that to how you live your life politically and socially. Many people say, "I'm not into politics. I don't really care." That's bullshit. It's a cop-out. If you're into spirituality, how can you *not* think that politics is important? Not that you become a political activist and go live in the woods, but there should be some part of you that looks at your life from a political standpoint like, "I'm not going to shop at Walmart. I'm not going to wear Nikes. I look at their labor practices and how it affects the world around me." If someone is spiritual, there should be a sense of political thought in how they live.

You cannot change anyone in the world / The only one you can change is yourself.

—“Ten Thousand Ways to Rebel and Fight” by SMZB

JM: What comes first, personal liberation or social liberation?

WU WEI (SMZB): Personal liberation is first and foremost, but personal liberation must also be accompanied by self-discipline, although this is not easy to achieve. There is no absolute freedom, which is the difference between humans and animals. Let me calm down first. I can express my emotions through punk music. It is not meditation or martial arts. Understanding and knowing myself is also part of the content of thinking. This song is to say that everyone is an individual, with their own ideas and way of life, and they should not interfere with others, and should not be interfered with by others.

JM: Do you view yourself as a spiritual person?

ISHAY BERGER (Useless ID): Not at all, but it *is* funny, because I may be more spiritual than what I might view myself. Does that make sense?

GABRIEL KUHN (*Sober for the Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge and Radical Politics*): One of the main difficulties in talking about spirituality is terminology. If you associate spirituality closely with religion or esoteric trends it often has negative connotations. Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) saw a strong spiritual dimension in his anarchism. He means that in order to change society you need to change your spirit, *yourself*. This means changing the way you perceive the world and this leads to affecting the way you interact with other human beings and other forms of life that you encounter in your daily existence. A lot of straight-edge folks would say that it allows them to relate to the world around them in ways they perceive as more compassionate. Parts of straight edge have made the link to spirituality very explicitly. Krishna straight edge bands picked a very specific kind of spirituality, which is Krishna culture. This may appeal to some people yet others view it as dogmatic or ideological. I think these are very conflicting issues that one has to confront personally.

DICK LUCAS (Subhumans / Citizenfish): Spirituality is very much about doing what you believe in and being aware of other sources of information. Spiritualness is hard to pin down, really. Every person has got their own percentage of how much spirituality they need to take notice of. You’ve got to function in everyday life. It’s not like we’re all sitting in caves being very spiritual, because we don’t have the time or will to do that. Why should we? We only live once and there’s a lot of things to do and people to interact with. Spirituality is a far more subtle thing

than can be described in words. It's a resonance between people that fires people up.

JORDAN COOPER (Revelation Records): With punk rock the biggest thing that can be called spiritual is the whole idea of doing something different from getting on the treadmill and doing what the herd is doing. In the human brain, that's what spirituality and all of those feelings are triggered by. The thing that drives people to be spiritual is the same feeling that drives them to listen to punk or try to understand what's going on in the world. It's about expanding their mind and understanding of the world and hopefully trying to do something about the things they think are wrong. Punk and spirituality connect primarily because some people use spirituality to get to that place.

JM: I like Shelter and the lyrics blew me away in songs like "Appreciation" and "Empathy." Isn't it a bit ironic to have such intense music that talks about compassion?

JORDAN COOPER (Revelation Records): It makes no sense. I agree! My mom was one of the first people to point it out to me because she read Youth of Today's lyrics and said, "Jordan, the lyrics are so positive but the music is so angry. I don't understand!" That's pretty true! Youth of Today is a special case because Ray (Cappo) wanted to have this positive message in his music and he had a hard time actually being a positive person. The youth culture of the Northeast (United States) is probably not too different than it is anywhere and everything we did was to belittle each other. That didn't go away when Youth of Today started but they wanted to be positive. There is a conflict there. They were an anomaly in punk. Shelter was pretty much only talking about Hare Krishna and the things Ray picked up from that. I'm sure if anybody read the lyrics—even Ray himself—we'd find contradictions in the lyrics. Like belittling someone who doesn't express compassion is not really compassionate.

SPIRITUAL SEARCH

PENELOPE SPHEERIS (*The Decline of Western Civilization* / *Wayne's World*): The reason I've been through this spiritual search is because I got dosed with ecstasy at a Burning Man festival and everything changed since then. I really almost OD'd. If you've ever been out to Burning Man, there ain't no fucking doctors around. I was pitching a tent, drinking a beer and these girls came by and I think they put something in my beer. I was tripping big time. I stayed in the van that I

rented and I wouldn't let anyone talk to me. That's when the whole devil thing started! (*laugh*) I was sure they were all working with the devil. I wouldn't let any of my friends in the van and I kept throwing up out the door and looking around and seeing these naked people drive by on bicycles with beanies on their heads spinning around. I thought, "Jesus! I am in hell!"

JM: This would not be a good ad for Burning Man. Sounds scary.

PENELOPE SPHEERIS (*The Decline of Western Civilization / Wayne's World*): It was the most frightening thing in my life! I thought I had died and gone to hell. I was used to waking up really early and I knew what time the sun comes up and the sun didn't come up when it was supposed to. That was a big red flag right there, you know? (*laugh*) I looked up on this mountain—and dig it, there ain't no mountains there, it's on a dry lake bed—I look up on this mountain and there were neon signs and all these naked people up there fucking in public! "Okay, I'm in hell." Finally, the sun came up. When you're more north, it comes up later. I didn't realize that. Anyway, I busted the hell out of there, left all my friends and just took off. I drove back to the airport and said I had to get away. After that I think my brain flipped around. Just the fact that I lived through it was a pretty big miracle. It probably should've killed me. I was never so sick and crazy in my life. It was almost like being re-born. They call it mind-expanding for a reason. Now, please children, do not take ecstasy. That stuff is too dangerous. People are probably going, "Hey, man I'm on ecstasy right now, what are you talking about?"

JM: People have different reactions to things.

PENELOPE SPHEERIS (*The Decline of Western Civilization / Wayne's World*): I think I'm allergic to it! I took a shitload of acid back in the day. I've been strung out on every drug there is. But I came off of them. They say that cigarette smoking is the hardest thing to quit. For me it was cocaine, even harder than heroin.

JACK GRISHAM (TSOL): Buddhists, Christians, Muslims—there's parts of all of those things that have been my truth. I realize that no one has *my* truth. No one. I've sat with some unbelievably heavy spiritual cats, guys that are known worldwide. I've hung out with them on a friend level and realized that *this guy is as fucked up as I am, man*. Unbelievable! I went to this monastery one time and I was sitting with these monks, talking. We were visiting with them and we started talking and the first thing out of this one monk's mouth was, "Fuck Brother Ted! He ain't doing his chores!" (*laugh*) He was pissed off! It was funny. People make pilgrimages to these guys and we're just sitting there laughing about it!

JOHN DOE EXPERIENCE—PUNK AND SPIRITUALITY

I've sometimes felt uncomfortable asking punk musicians about spirituality. I've wondered if they might think I'm trying to convert them to some religion or that I'm so dopey I don't realize that punk rock is robustly anti-authoritarian and anti-organized religion. So, here I am waiting to say hello to John Doe before a show with his band John Doe Experience. I introduce myself and inquire, "I'd like to do an interview with you for a book about punk and spirituality." Despite my fears, this query usually opens interesting conversations. But this time I get what I deserve when John Doe responds:

Punk rock and spirituality have absolutely nothing to do with each other.

—John Doe (X)

I quickly and awkwardly try to explain that I don't necessarily mean "religion" when I say "spirituality" and that I want to hear how he thinks punk has affected him and the world. But check this out; a few months later, Doe was back in town doing a show with X and I spoke with him backstage, and he immediately remembered our earlier conversation and humbly offered a new take. "I was being flip with you last time we spoke," Doe offered. "I'll do an interview with you about punk and spirituality. I may not have the same ideas as other people, but I'll talk with you." We ended up having a great conversation.

JOHN DOE (X): I'm not a traditional spiritual person. I'm not religious or anything like that. I do believe in a life force. If you're engaged and aware and in the moment, then I guess you're spiritual. If you're part of the world and you're not just living in the future or living in the past; that to me is spiritual.

JM: A year ago I told you I was working on this project about punk rock and spirituality and you said, "Punk rock and spirituality have absolutely nothing to do with each other."

JOHN DOE (X): When I responded to that—it depends on your definition of spirituality. And I'm not sure what your definition is. As far as being at one with the world, being whatever they call it; in the flow, losing track of time because you're so engaged with what it is you're doing, whether it's surfing or skiing, playing music, meditating, gardening or whatever it might be. All those are the same. Whether it's punk rock, singer/songwriter, new age; music has that ability to make you lose track of time and be so fully mentally and physically engaged that

that's all you can do. When you have one of those transcendental performances all of those things are happening. You're also drawing on the past and seeing a connection between what the song was written about and what's going on presently and you're sort of experiencing all of those elements simultaneously. In addition to singing and playing a song! That's certainly something! I don't know what it is. I guess that's spiritual.

JM: It's amazing what we human beings are capable of doing simultaneously.

JOHN DOE (X): I don't know if it's *simultaneous*. I heard that your brain is so fluid and facile that it can switch from one thing to another. You're not actually multi-tasking, you're switching and focusing on completely different things.

JM: It's just very, very fast.

JOHN DOE (X): Yes. Seemingly simultaneous.

JM: There are huge realms of religion that are about authority and rules. Punk rock often sings out against that. When I spoke with you before, what did you understand by *spiritual*?

JOHN DOE (X): Something that is meditative in a quiet sense. Not active. Spirituality can't get away from religion. But religion is rules and tradition and all these things that have been built up over the years. Certainly, punk rock and religion are *not* similar because the origins of music and especially punk rock, are inclusive—well, parts of it are inclusive. You can be who you want to be. And religion is exclusive. You have to be with that one group.

BILLY ZOOM (X): Music in general, if it's done correctly, comes from the heart. Playing music is a spiritual experience. If you can tune in, or tune out—however you want to look at it—the music just flows from your subconscious. At risk of sounding too arty—I don't like to sound arty—when it's good, that's how it happens, it just flows. It's sort of a spiritual thing. You don't really know where it comes from. It just keeps coming. I've only recently gotten to the point where I can say the word “art” without getting a tone of sarcasm in my voice. I didn't like being called an artist for a lot of years. I've kind of accepted it now.

JM: Why didn't you enjoy being called an artist?

BILLY ZOOM (X): To me, art was when you made it sound bad on purpose because you couldn't really play. If you could really play then you didn't call it art. As Keith Richards said, “Art is short for Arthur.”

IAN MACKAYE (Minor Threat / Fugazi): I think it's a reach to bring in the spirituality aspect of it. I kind of know what you mean by it. A twenty-one-year-old girl said to me the other day, “It's like everything's just gotten thrown into a blender

lately.” That is so true. People are trying to explain life and are just mixing in all these different elements. I find it inspiring to see people who have spiritual practices; I’m interested in what people get out of it.

A FOOL TO LIKE SUFFERING

JM: I hear in some of your lyrics, ideas that address suffering. What do you think about suffering?

DAVID THOMAS (Rocket From the Tombs / Pere Ubu): It is best not to! (*laugh*) Go on with your question.

JM: I like that answer, though.

DAVID THOMAS (Rocket From the Tombs / Pere Ubu): Well, that is the most obvious answer there is! You’d be a fool to like suffering. But we live in times and worlds where there is a lot of pain. My pain isn’t anywhere near the same pain as some starving, dying child somewhere in Africa or Asia. It is a different sort of pain. But I don’t think that you can get away without talking about pain. I am not going to pretend that I understand that person’s pain. But pain is pain. And how you deal with it is how you deal with it.

JM: It’s ironic but tragic that some of the ways that people try to get away from suffering cause more suffering.

DAVID THOMAS (Rocket From the Tombs / Pere Ubu): That is the general human condition. Whatever you try to solve, you usually end up screwing up more. That is pretty standard stuff at this point. In the end, we are all individuals. You—Me. We are all separate islands. You reach out and that is part of what art is supposed to be. It is the attempt to reach out beyond the prison of words and pictures and sign language or whatever else. Music works with the same elements that human consciousness works with. So, you try to achieve some kind of communion with other human beings at a deep, deep level. And that level has to be beyond words because words are images and concepts. Human beings are a weird combination of physicality and spirituality, as music is.

ANDY GILL (Gang of Four): You get into a very complicated situation trying to decide what “spiritual” means. There would be an argument to explore that word and see it in a very wide context. There’s something about Gang of Four—the music, lyrics, the performance and the whole thing—which slightly connects with the Blues in a very non-obvious way. There is something in our music about the universal human condition and it’s a Humanist argument. In that sense Gang

of Four does connect with spirituality. Initially I would say, “Spiritual? What? That’s not on the agenda.” But on the other hand, if you consider it in a very wide context than I suppose it is.

JM: Do you have a sense that Earth is paradise and oftentimes we’re just not seeing it? Or is there something missing, that would make it paradise?

DAVE ALLEN (Gang of Four / Shriekback): It goes back to what’s spiritual and what’s not. It even goes back to the, “We Live as We Dream Alone” idea. I don’t know what we’re missing. Perhaps we are, but I’m not that spiritual a person. I feel you are. And that’s fine with me but it could be a long, drawn-out discussion!

ROB FISH (108): The stronger people will always take advantage of the weaker people. I don’t believe in this spiritual utopia where everybody is so spiritually or psychologically advanced that they’re always helping the person next to them. Political movements are just like religious movements. You have a theology or philosophy and then you have the popular understanding or acceptance of a dynamic within that philosophy that then defines the movement. Sometimes you’ll have splinter groups that come out with a different dynamic. I wish it was as easy as pre-packaging the truth to ensure there is no pain and suffering.

In the punk rock scene, the shows I’ve played lately (2007) there is really no sense of political, social or spiritual context. Maybe it’s the bands we’re playing with. We played with a few bands that at least have some sort of political or social message around vegetarianism. If you go to a show, it’s all about dancing, stage diving and scene unity. And not as much give and take about spiritual or political topics. In the late 1980s hardcore scene everyone was straight edge or vegetarian. A few years later in the early 1990s there started to be a lot more ideas around politics and social issues and the whole spirituality thing came to the forefront. I think it’s cyclical and it’ll come around.

TAKE GOD OUT OF THE CHURCH AND INTO NATURE

JIM LINDBERG (Pennywise / *Punk Rock Dad*): Right as the band was starting, I was finishing up at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). I was an English major and luckily had a great teacher for American literature who turned me on to Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. For me, growing up listening to punk rock was like finding your patron saint. If you read most of Emerson’s essays it’s like a punk rock Bible! There is so much information in his works about self-reliance; look at yourself for the answers. About being a

non-conformist and not looking to other people about how to behave. Not falling into tradition, but making your own way in life.

I'm simplifying it but the Transcendentalists were one of the first movements to try and take God out of the church and bring it out into nature. To truly understand the divine, you need to experience nature. Without expressing it directly, they were starting to mistrust organized religion and how it can be corrupted. Thoreau was a student of Emerson and put it into practice by building a cabin out in the woods in Walden, and tried to put the principles to work. It was great for me to absorb and definitely it found its place in our lyrics and songs. It's something that people have responded to; I hear from people around the world that they get the message.

JOHN DOE (X): Living in Los Angeles, I don't think I could do it anymore because it's so difficult to get from one place to another. Bakersfield is a lot lower impact. On the other hand, living in the country, it's really difficult to complete things. If you need to get your kids to school or go to the grocery store, you have to drive for ten miles. The round trip takes forty minutes. It's always something. It just depends on how you deal with that something. So, does that something really get you down? The interference between what you *want* and what you *can* do: How do you deal with that? Most people are happier when they have less interference and less stress.

JOHNETTE NAPOLITANO (Concrete Blonde): I don't think people are aware of their need for stillness and solitude. Some people aren't comfortable with peace and quiet! Or it could be a raging forty mile-per-hour wind slamming my shutters to splinters any given night just as easily. I'm pretty conscious of time and believe in reflecting every once in a while. Am I where I thought I would be in life? It helped me to remove myself from a certain amount of influence, a lot of noise, static. Physically just shoving oneself through the population is a hell of a chore. I trust the sense of perspective I have when I'm out here in the desert.

JOE CORRÉ (Burn Punk London / Malcolm McLaren's son): On a personal level, I've always felt very connected with the Earth, nature and all the fantastic things in the wild and that energy that we get from the Earth we live on. That is very spiritual to me. That's all the spirituality that I need. I get so much pleasure, energy and clarity of thought from connecting with nature. First and foremost, we need to respect our habitat and not destroy it. If you really feel that in your heart, then that's all the spirituality you need. By respecting the Earth, you respect other people, creatures, animals, plants and water and everything we live on.

PATTI PATTEX (Cut My Skin): Feeling your existence is spirituality. Connection with nature, one's self and all other living beings. Gardening is spiritual, and

PUNK AND SPIRITUALITY

revolutionary nowadays. Everything that triggers joie de vivre is spirituality; music or helping to redress grievances, showing solidarity, doing the right thing even at risk of being in danger. The true spirit of punk is integrity. We wanted to abolish injustice, disrespect and violence so that no one rules over others. Anarchy! The key word to happiness. Not only in the political sense, but the freedom to listen to the inner voice—it is a spiritual experience. My personal spiritual healing happens when I'm near the ocean; the vastness of the sea opens my soul.

2

“WHAT WE ALL WANT” SELF-EXPRESSION/AUTHENTICITY/ LIBERATION AND LIVING FREE

People forgot what so-called real punk came from, which was just a form of self-expression.

—Ari Up (The Slits)

Authenticity is about being alive. It's what makes great rock, funk and pop music. Utterly thrilling.

—Jon King (Gang of Four)

While relearning to trust my mind / I recognized I still knew sincerity.

—“Spiritual Level of Gang Shit” by Soul Glo
(*Diaspora Problems* 2022)

HEART OF PUNK IS SELF-EXPRESSION

NADYA OSTROFF (The Slits / The Home Office): The heart of punk rock is the need for self-expression. If you're deprived of self-expression, you're deprived of your identity. You're deprived of your sexuality, your physicality. That's what was happening maybe in America in the '70s, but definitely in the UK. There was so much oppression on so many people from different angles. They all came together and had to fight to find an artistic justice and justify what they thought about their oppression.

ARI UP (The Slits): There’s a way you barricade yourself and put limits on yourself. That’s what is different about The Slits. They’re not politically correct. They just move with the flow and humor and it’s a balance of having fun and still being expressive and serious about topics that affect people, affect us as women. When people put a label, then you limit yourself and you don’t fully become what you can be. I just say Punky Reggae now because I don’t know what else to say anymore! People need labels all the time. People forget what so-called real punk came from, which was just a form of self-expression. People forgot, so now I remind them! Because most bands, though they say they’re punk, they’re really a rock band that’s just influenced by punk. But they’re not really punk so-called, even though I don’t like using that term, even. But I have to use it now because people have strayed from the real shit.

NADYA OSTROFF (The Slits / The Home Office): Every generation needs to have a kind of reassessment. It’s a coming-of-age thing. Sometimes I think people don’t come of age until they’re fifty! I don’t think it needs to be only a youth thing. I find that really patronizing. It’s an evolving process and that’s what the Slits is about. You’re always learning and growing. Ari hasn’t finished—she’s just started! She’s always just starting because she’s always learning, always thinking. It’s the same for all of us.

JM: There’s an ongoing process that’s never completed.

NADYA OSTROFF (The Slits): I think that has a lot to do with spirituality. I’ve made some wrong turns in my life. I didn’t grow up in a stable atmosphere. What it does teach you is that from a negative, there is always a positive. I know this idea is overused, but it taught me to be really independent and that nobody takes care of me except myself. That was the most important thing I learned in life from a very early age; I’m responsible for myself right now and for the future.

GLENN WALLIS (Ruin / *An Anarchist’s Manifesto*): I will risk sounding like an old romantic, but I feel like self-expression is the whole point. Get working on creative projects you deem valuable! I feel unmoored unless I’m working on a project. I don’t do this under the capitalist compulsion to produce. I do it in the spirit of self-overcoming and generosity.

KID CONGO POWERS (Gun Club / Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds / The Pink Monkey Birds): I came out of the freedom of the glam rock scene. David Bowie had liberated all of us! And given us hope and an example to identify with, whether he was really bisexual or not. If he was really an alien or not. Punk rock was also quite liberating because I was able to dress up and prance around and be obnoxious, but free. At least within that world. That didn’t make me free in the rest of my life and with my parents. Punk rock was perfect because so many people I

met were queer. There were already trans people in punk rock then. So, it was a great gathering spot. I'd go between Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York and meet my tribe. There was a definite openness with people about freedom of sexual expression.

CONEY ISLAND OF THE MIND

LYDIA LUNCH (Teenage Jesus and the Jerks / Big Sexy Noise): I want to spread pleasure to other people. And who are those people going to be but *other people* who have also had an incredible amount of anger, hatred or torture in their lives? So, you want to go in there as some kind of a healer, which is why I collaborate with a lot of people who are pretty intense. With art I want to create a sacred space where there is no fucking bullshit. You can be exactly like you are to the nth degree.

In my nights I want to create a private opium den of the mind—a *Coney Island of the Mind*—where you let that all go and you claim what is rightfully yours. Which is the absolutely phantasmagorical experience of being fucking alive on this planet! It is so fucking amazing and so outrageous. *People aside*. If you don't appreciate the most minor things, you're not going to appreciate the bigger things. If you gluttonize on everything and you still feel that it is not enough, you better reduce it to really open your fucking eyes and see how glorious so much of every day is. If you don't, you're denying yourself. I've never denied myself. I want other people to see themselves as they are and I want to give them an opportunity to create something that would not be created without this sacred space. I'm feeling much better than I've ever felt and I just find a way to not be driven by the madness that was put upon me. Not only to use it to the best of my ability, but get back to the origins of my essence before the contamination of life hit me. So, that's my spiritual journey.

MITA SCHAMAL (Namenlos): We don't need to think there is something missing. If we're able to open our hearts, then we can touch each other without any violence and war. There's so much possibility to live in freedom, to enjoy all the richness in the world. But even in a country where you have a lot of money and food, people are unhappy. They're too busy. They are busy so they don't have to feel their feelings. They didn't learn that the feelings they have are the best you can feel. If you learn to really feel feelings, and then see that every feeling passes and then there will come a new feeling. It's the same with thoughts.

DANNY ELFMAN (Oingo Boingo / film composer): Students today ask me, “How did I get started?” I say, “I can tell you how I got started, but I wouldn’t recommend that. Because that kind of attitude will most likely end your career in two seconds!” But I didn’t give a shit! I didn’t care if I had a career or not. I didn’t care if the film studios liked my music. I really didn’t care about anything except that I was having fun and my director was buying into it and allowing me to do it. The rest of the world, I could just give a shit. Over the years I realized that was from the punk influence of just not caring what the establishment or the people at the party that I was crashing into, what they cared. And the fact that they hated me inspired me more! It all tied together in a weird way; that ability to take fuel from hostility definitely comes from that punk thing of “Spit on me, throw shoes at me. I don’t give a shit!” The more you do that, the more I’m just going to throw it back in your face. It’s an attitude. It’s not necessarily a healthy attitude, but fortunately it worked for me.

JM: There’s a promotional video for your mantra-based album *Wilder Shores* (2017) where you’re discussing with Simrit Kaur your own history with the Germs and the Go-Go’s, and you say, “Discovering mantra music was like discovering punk rock all over again.” What’s the common ground between punk and mantra music as you’ve experienced those?

BELINDA CARLISLE (The Germs / The Go-Go’s / Black Randy and the Metrosquad): My musical beginnings came out of the garage and that early music was always a real expression of where I was at inside. It wasn’t necessarily angry, but it was a complete anything-goes form of self-expression. And mantra is pretty much the same thing. It’s kind of hard to put into words. Both are forms of self-expression, especially with combining the two genres. I’ve been doing this for forty years and anything I’ve ever done has always been a true expression of where I’m at in my life at that time. That is the similarity between my beginnings and now. It all makes complete sense. My last album came out of living in France for twenty-four years. That French album (*Voila*) was a reflection of my love of French pop. Every album I’ve done has made sense in reflecting where I’ve been at that time. My early days with the Germs and the early Go-Go’s and Black Randy and the Metrosquad is very similar to *Wilder Shores*. It’s just hard to put into words.

CECI BASTIDA (Tijuana No!) As a teenager, I used to think that people should talk about political issues in their lyrics. I’d think, “Why aren’t you talking about poverty and corruption in Mexico?” But people express art in their own way, and it doesn’t have to be political. It can be whatever you want and that’s what’s great about the arts and music. There are other ways of being involved with social issues. I know many people that make music and don’t talk about anything

political but they're active in their personal lives, participating in events that benefit certain groups or donating time with different organizations that are doing great work.

IT'S THERAPY, REALLY

DARIUS KOSKI (Swingin' Utters): The songs I write are extremely personal. Sometimes it's not what *I* am but what I see in other people or what I've learned through the years. It's super personal. It's therapy, really. If I wrote these songs and had them lying around it wouldn't work as well as the lucky situation I'm in now, where I have a couple of bands and somebody's willing to put out our records. So, someone can hear my ideas! Because you want someone to listen to you! Really, to me it's like therapy. Just getting it out there is huge for me; it's a massive burden lifted off of me!

STEWART EBERSOLE (*Barred for Life: How Black Flag's Iconic Logo Became Punk Rock's Secret Handshake*): Can you imagine a more awesome life? You're open to things and free. We're all empowered by a totally different force. Punks were closer to the spirit, closer to the nature of the soul. We were operating from an *I want to make my own decisions* standpoint. I want to express what the creator put into me and what the universe endowed me to do. Was that to work at a crummy job that somebody else invented? Or go to third world countries and help people feed themselves? Why did the universe put me on this tiny piece of rock? You're in better harmony with your own soul than someone who says, "I've got this job because this is the job that will get me the house, car and husband I deserve."

RAMSEY KANAAN (AK Press / Political Asylum): All music contains within it an instinct for freedom, or *rhythm* of freedom, shall we say. Music is one of those wonderful things like words and ideas, which can and ought to be unfettered. Like the broad river of life which we both drink from and we also contribute back to.

JM: What was the best part of playing drums with Crass?

PENNY RIMBAUD (Crass): The packing up and going home part of it! (*laugh*) I'm not a performer. I now do a lot of performing of my poetry. I don't enjoy it. I don't enjoy being on stage. I never have.

JM: You played pretty fast drums in Crass.

PENNY RIMBAUD (Crass): Yeah, I wanted to get off stage! (*big laugh*) I used to get a lot of complaints particularly from Steve (Ignorant) and Eve (Libertine) because